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Mormons Are No Longer a Majority in Utah: Causes, Consequences, and Implications for the Sociology of Religion

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Abstract

This paper uses a sample of Utahans to estimate the percentage of the state belonging to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the LDS, or Mormon Church). We find that the Mormon share of Utah's population is lower than is commonly believed. This finding has relevance for certain theories in the sociology of religion that make inferences about church growth and vitality based on the religious demography of Utah. We show how the process of secularization, changes in Mormon fertility, and shifts in migration into Utah combine to alter the religious landscape of the state. We close with a discussion of the implications of our findings for the sociology of religion.

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Keywords

Mormonism – LDS – Utah – secularization

This paper estimates the share of Utah's population belonging to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the LDS, or Mormon Church). This estimate is useful for sociologists because the Mormon "monopoly" in Utah is relevant to important theories of church growth and vitality (Stark and Finke 2004; Stark 2001; Stark 1998; Phillips 1998). Moreover, the size and density of Utah's Mormon population is a case study for how churches and their adherents behave when religious and community norms are fused (Yorgason 2002; Goodsell 2000; Bahr and Forste 1998).

Our estimate relies on self-reported religious identification from surveys collected in Utah. We show how this enumeration of Utah Mormons is more appropriate for making sociological inferences than are the LDS Church's official membership statistics. Contrary to the church's numbers, we find that Mormons are no longer a majority in Utah. In the pages below, we detail our methodology and discuss the implications of our findings for the sociology of religion.

1 Sociocultural Trends and the Mormon Majority in Utah

In 1847, Mormon pioneers settled in the territory that would become the state of Utah. These settlements comprise the traditional Mormon homeland. Utah achieved statehood in 1896, and by the early 20th century, most of Utah's inhabitants were descendants of these pioneers, reared in the distinctive subculture of Mormonism (May 1983).

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints[1] is headquartered in Salt Lake City, and Utah is the epicenter of Mormon life. Latter-day Saints have been the majority for most of the state's history, and their preponderance undergirds the church's considerable influence on Utah's politics, economics, and culture (Decker 2019; Arrington 2004; Toney *et al.* 2003). However, three recent sociocultural trends threaten this majority and the hegemony it sustains.

1 When referring to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we follow the usage recommended by the Associated Press Stylebook. The AP recommends using the full name of the church on first reference. Use of the terms "Mormon" and "LDS" is acceptable for space and clarity (See Riess 2019b).

1.1 *Secularization*

The first trend is accelerating secularization. Secularization is the process whereby religion becomes less important in the lives of individuals, and less influential in society (Bruce 2013). In the United States, a hallmark of secularization is a rise in the number of people with no denominational affiliation (Kasselstrand, *et al.* 2023).

Secularization is manifest in Utah, and the proportion of the state's residents with no religion is increasing (Phillips and Cragun 2013). Among Utahans, "none" is now the second most common response to survey questions asking respondents to report their church membership, trailing only the LDS Church in frequency (Phillips 2018). It is likely that many of these "Nones" are former Mormons (Albrecht and Bahr 1983).

1.2 *Fertility*

The second trend is declining Mormon fertility. The LDS church promotes large families, and the Mormon birthrate exceeds that of non-Mormons in the United States (Heaton 1992). Accordingly, Utah's birthrate was the highest in the nation throughout the last half of the 20th century (Shain 2019). But in the 21st century, Mormon families are shrinking, and the gap between Mormon and non-Mormon fertility is narrowing (Phillips 2018). Consequently, the gap between Utah's birthrate and the national average is narrowing as well (Perlich 2016).

1.3 *Migration*

The final trend is a surge of people moving to Utah, particularly from California (Larsen 2023). The pandemic accelerated this trend, and the share of Utah's population growth due to in-migration reached 62% in 2022 (Harris and Prior 2023). Evidence suggests that most people moving to Utah are non-Mormons (Phillips 2018:327).

2 Previous Estimates of Utah's Mormon Population

These 21st century sociocultural trends suggest that the Mormon majority in Utah is waning or lapsed, but scholars have not confirmed this. Journalists have investigated the matter but have not found evidence of a decline. In 2009, the *Salt Lake Tribune*—Utah's paper of record—reported that 62% of Utah's population was Mormon (Canham 2012). In 2020, the *Tribune* updated their figures, reporting that the Mormon share of Utah's population had barely slipped to 60.7% (Canham 2020). This implies that secularization, reduced fertility, and

surging migration combined to reduce Utah's Mormon majority by a paltry 1.3%. Given what social scientists know about the impact of these sociocultural trends, how can this be?

2.1 *LDS Church Membership Criteria*

We assert that the numbers *The Salt Lake Tribune* reports—which come from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—are dubious because of how this denomination defines membership. The LDS Church confers membership on anyone who is baptized and confirmed.[2] Aside from a few who are excommunicated or formally ask to have their name removed, members remain on church rolls until they die, or until their 110th birthday if their whereabouts are unknown (Stewart 2022). Using these criteria for membership, the church's numbers are accurate. However, these criteria are not useful for social scientists. On what grounds would a sociologist count someone who no longer identifies as a Mormon—and who may have joined another church—as a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?

Several studies that have attempted to use LDS Church statistics to make inferences about the demography of Mormonism have found these data to be unreliable and unsuitable for social science research (Cragun and Lawson 2010; Lawson and Cragun 2012; Lawson et al. 2020; Phillips 2006; Stewart 2022). Scholars have noted that local ward rosters are unusable as sampling frames for surveying Mormons (Cornwall 1998). The church's claimed membership total may exceed the number of self-identified Mormons by 50% (Stewart 2022).

The *Salt Lake Tribune* also encountered problems with these numbers. For example, one reporter found that the church claimed more members in one Utah county than there were residents of that county (Larsen 2022). *Tribune* reporters—who obtained these data from the church via a Freedom of Information Act request—write:

> *The Salt Lake Tribune* tracks the Mormon population using county-level membership numbers the church gives to state officials for demographic purposes. The numbers include everyone on LDS membership rolls, which includes people who do not consider themselves Mormons or people who were lost "in transit." The LDS Church counts people who move in their last known address until they are either located or until they would have reached the age of 110 (Canham 2012).

2 Children born to Mormon parents—called "children of record"—are included in membership totals from birth until they are eligible for baptism at age eight. If they are not baptized, they are no longer counted as members.

2.2 *Self-Reported Church Membership*

For social scientists interested in religious demography, a valid way to measure church membership is *self-identification*. What denominational affiliation (if any) do people report when asked? Surveys that ask respondents to report their religion paint a different portrait of Utah's religious landscape. For instance, in 2022 the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) estimated that self-identified Mormons comprise 55% of Utah's population—still a majority but one smaller than church statistics denote (PRRI 2022). Nevertheless, PRRI's findings cannot be accepted uncritically because they surveyed a small number of Utahans. Small samples yield imprecise estimates of population parameters.

Considering these issues, we set out to provide a reliable estimate of the percentage of Utahans who self-identify as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We outline our methods below.

3 Methods

We employed Qualtrics, a Utah-based survey and data collection company, to assemble a sample of Utahans from a large panel of respondents. The sample uses quotas for age, sex, and race/ethnicity to align with census data. Matching the characteristics of the sample to the census allows us to approximate representativeness.

We acknowledge the shortcomings of this sampling strategy (see Blair and Blair 2014). An experiment conducted by Pew Research Center found that panel surveys can produce unreliable estimates of population parameters (Kennedy et al. 2016). We do two things to address these shortcomings. First, we present our results as provisional, and invite other scholars to use standard representative sampling to confirm our findings. Second, we compensate for sampling error by fielding a sample of Utahans that is much larger than the one used by PRRI. This allows us to use more stringent thresholds for statistical significance (99.9% confidence intervals rather than the typical 95%) when presenting our findings.

Data collection took place in August 2022. The final sample includes 1,909 individuals. Men constitute 39.2% of respondents, women are 59.5%, and 1.3% identify as non-binary, third gender, or other. The mean age of respondents is 41.3 years, with a standard deviation of 17 years. Respondents were presented with five possible race categories and asked to select all that apply. Among those choosing a single race category, 84.2% are white, 2.6% are Asian, 1.9% are Black or African American, 1.5% are American Indian or Alaska Native, and

1.4% are Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. Mixed race individuals comprise 6.7% of the sample, and 11.2% are Hispanic. Table 1 compares the demographics of our sample to census data from the state of Utah. Apart from the gender distribution, our sample matches the demography of Utah's population.

TABLE 1 Demographic characteristics of Utah and sample*

		Census	Sample
Race			
	White Only	91.4	84.2
	Black Only	1.2	1.9
	Asian Only	2.5	2.6
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Island Only	1.1	1.4
	Native American or Native Alaskan Only	1.4	1.5
	Multiracial	8.5	6.7
Hispanic		14.8	11.2
Gender			
	Male	50.1	39.2
	Female	49.9	59.5
	Other	-	1.0
Age			
	20 to 24	12.2	19.4
	25 to 34	21.3	21.8
	35 to 44	20.3	21.3
	45 to 54	15.6	13.8
	55 to 49	6.8	5.4
	60 to 64	6.8	5.4
	65 to 74	10.5	9.0
	75 to 84	4.8	3.0
	> 85	1.6	0.6
Education			
	Less than high school	6.8	3.7
	High school	22.1	23.2
	Some college	24.7	28.2
	Associate's	9.5	12.6
	Bachelor's	24.1	21.2
	Graduate or Professional	12.7	10.0

*Data are from the Qualtrics survey

4 Estimating Utah's Mormon Population

Based on our sample, we estimate that 42% of Utah's population is self-identified members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.[3] We calculated a 99.9% confidence interval for this estimate. The upper confidence limit was 45.7%, the lower confidence limit was 38.3%. Thus, we find that Mormons are no longer the majority in Utah.

Our estimate is well below the 60.1% figure provided by the LDS Church and published by *The Salt Lake Tribune*. Even accounting for the limitations of our sampling strategy, it is reasonable to assume that a significant discrepancy exists between the number of members on official church rolls and the number of self-identified Mormons in Utah.

4.1 *Accounting for Membership Discrepancies*

In 2001, the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS)—a survey of self-reported religious affiliation with over 50,000 respondents—estimated that 53% of Utahans were Mormon (Kosmin and Keysar 2009). That is nearly 10% lower than the 60.1% figure published in *The Salt Lake Tribune* almost a decade later (2009), and after a period of accelerating secularization (Kasselstrand, *et al.* 2023).

Table 2 examines the demography of Utah in the 21st century. The table's second column estimates the share of Utah's population that was Mormon between 2001 (based on the ARIS) and 2022 (based on our data). These yearly estimates assume a straight-line rate of decline. The table's third column shows estimates of Utah's total population for these years based on census data and a straight-line rate of increase. Column 4 calculates the number of Mormons in Utah based on the estimated proportion from column 2 and the total population from column 3.

3 We reached this conclusion after carefully examining our data, including responses entered in the open-ended "other" category on our question asking for religious affiliation. A few people who selected "other" entered a response in the text field that placed them in one of the preset categories. This includes one person who selected "other" but then identified themself as "Mormon" in the text field.

TABLE 2 Estimated Mormon population in Utah over time*

Year	% Mormon	Utah population	Mormon population
2001	53.0	2,284,000	1,210,520
2002	52.5	2,337,321	1,226,537
2003	52.0	2,390,641	1,241,995
2004	51.4	2,443,962	1,256,895
2005	50.9	2,497,282	1,271,236
2006	50.4	2,550,603	1,285,018
2007	49.9	2,603,923	1,298,242
2008	49.3	2,657,244	1,310,907
2009	48.8	2,710,564	1,323,014
2010	48.3	2,763,885	1,334,562
2011	47.8	2,814,658	1,344,334
2012	47.2	2,865,431	1,353,575
2013	46.7	2,916,204	1,362,284
2014	46.2	2,966,977	1,370,461
2015	45.7	3,017,751	1,378,106
2016	45.1	3,068,524	1,385,219
2017	44.6	3,119,297	1,391,800
2018	44.1	3,170,070	1,397,850
2019	43.6	3,220,843	1,403,367
2020	43.0	3,271,616	1,408,353
2021	42.5	3,338,000	1,419,445
2022	42.0	3,380,800	1,419,445

* Data are from American Religious Identification Survey and the Qualtrics survey

If our estimate is accurate, in 2022 there were 1,424,094 self-identified Mormons in Utah, which is 749,466 fewer than the 2,173,560 on LDS Church rolls at the end of 2021 (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2023). The discrepancy between our estimate of self-identified Mormons and the church's number aligns closely with our finding (displayed in Table 3 and discussed below) that about two thirds of Utah Mormons raised in the faith will remain self-identified as adults, while about a third will apostatize (1,424,094/2,173,560=.66).

The discrepancy between the number of self-identified Mormons and the LDS Church's membership tally is due to accumulated individuals on church

rolls who no longer consider themselves LDS, but who meet the church's standard for membership. There are thousands of Utahns who have died, joined other churches, or moved out of the state who are nevertheless counted as Latter-day Saints and will continue to be counted for decades.

5 Secularization, Fertility, and Migration

In addition to our estimate of the Mormon share of Utah's population, we also investigate the potential impact of the three sociocultural trends we outlined above.

5.1 *Secularization*

To investigate the impact of secularization, we examined patterns of religious switching and disaffiliation in our data. Table 3 cross-tabulates each respondents' religious affiliation at age 12 (columns) with their current religious affiliation (rows). Cells under each heading show percentages, and the rightmost column labeled "N" shows the number of respondents raised within each religion or without religion. Respondents who report the same religious orientation that they had when they were 12 are "retained." The others have "switched."

The religious orientation with the highest rate of retention is "no religion." Seventy-seven percent of those raised without a formal religious affiliation continue to eschew organized religion. Mormons had the second highest rate of retention. About two thirds of those raised Mormon still adhere to the faith. This retention rate is dramatically lower than the 96–97% retention rate reported by Heaton in the 1980s (Heaton 1992:1527).

Twenty-four percent of those raised LDS report that they currently have no religious affiliation. More Mormons in our sample switched to "no religion" than switched to all other religious orientations combined. This is consistent with studies showing that when Mormons lose their faith they tend to forsake organized religion altogether, rather than switch to a different denomination (Albrecht and Bahr 1983). The percentage of Utahns with no religion rose from 18% to 25% between 2013 and 2022 (PRRI 2022). This is a stark reversal of switching patterns in the 1970s, when the LDS Church gained many more members by conversion than it lost via apostasy (Roof and Hadaway 1977).

Thus, our data is consistent with the notion that secularization has eroded Utah's Mormon majority. Indeed, almost all the religious orientations displayed in Table 3 have a swath of former members who abandoned religion.

TABLE 3 Religion at age 12 versus current religion*

	Current religion (%)									
Religion at age 12	**No religion**	**Catholic**	**LDS or Mormon**	**Non-denom. Christian**	**Other Christian**	**Jewish**	**Buddhist**	**Muslim**	**Other**	**N**
LDS or Mormon	24.0	0.6	**67.3**	4.9	1.0	0.0	0.5	0.0	1.9	1069
No Religion	**77.5**	1.1	9.9	7.04	2.1	0.4	0.4	0.0	1.8	284
Catholic	20.2	**62.3**	7.7	7.7	1.1	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.6	183
Non-denom. Christian	28.1	0.0	9.7	**55.6**	5.1	0.0	0.5	0.0	1.0	196
Other Christian	22.0	0.8	14.6	11.4	**48.8**	0.0	0.0	0.8	1.6	123
Jewish	6.7	0.0	13.3	0.0	0.0	**60.0**	20.0	0.0	0.0	15
Buddhist	0.0	0.0	11.1	0.0	11.1	0.0	**66.7**	0.0	11.1	9
Muslim	18.2	0.0	9.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	18.2	**54.6**	0.0	11
Other	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	21.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	**68.4**	19

*Data are from the Qualtrics survey

5.2 *Fertility*

Mormon fertility was the foundation of LDS Church growth in Utah. From its inception, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been a pronatalist religion, and a preference for large families is rooted in Mormon theology (Heaton, Bahr and Jacobson 2004; Dollahite 2000). Mormons believe that people exist before they are born as spirits in a premortal realm. To achieve salvation, each spirit must inhabit a mortal body and live a righteous life (McConkie 1996). Early Mormon leaders taught that ensconcing spirits in babies born into Latter-day Saint homes improves the odds that they will follow the path to salvation. For this reason, leaders instructed church members not to limit the size of their families. Brigham Young explains:

> I have told you many times that there are multitudes of pure and holy spirits waiting to take tabernacles,[4] now what is our duty?— to prepare

4 In Mormon parlance—particularly in the 19th and early 20th centuries—"tabernacle" was a synonym for the mortal body, which is believed to be a vessel housing the immortal spirit (McConkie 1966).

> tabernacles for them; to take a course that will not tend to drive those spirits into the families of the wicked, where they will be trained in wickedness, debauchery, and every species of crime. It is the duty of every righteous man and woman to prepare tabernacles for all the spirits they can. (Van Wagoner 2009:1172)

This doctrine was used to justify polygamy (Hardy 1992). It is also one reason why the church frowns on birth control (Proctor 2003).

In Utah, the theological rationale for large families is buttressed by cultural norms and social pressure (Heaton 1989; Bush 1976). Large families are an outward manifestation of religious observance and faithfulness. Parents with few children are stigmatized as lax and selfish (Christiansen 1972).

Large Mormon families expanded the Mormon share of Utah's population from 1920 until the early 1990s (May 1983; Lehrer 1996). In the era after World War II, but before the advent of the Information Age, Utah's annual fertility rate outstripped the national rate by about 6 children per 1000 persons (Christiansen 1972). Utah had the nation's highest birthrate throughout the last half of the 20th century, and well into the 21st (Shain 2019; *Deseret News* 2010).

While LDS Church growth in most parts of the nation was based on acquiring converts through missionary work, growth in Utah was fueled by natural increase. Heaton reports that in the 1980s, Utah Mormons born into the faith outnumbered converts 5:1, and Utah ranks 50th among states in the number of convert baptisms per member (Heaton 1992). In 2009, Pew Research Center found that only 13% of self-identified Utah Mormons were converts (Pew Research Center 2009). By contrast, converts have been a majority of LDS Church members worldwide since the 1960s (Hammarberg 2013:41; *151st Annual Conference Report* 1961: 27).

Presently, the gap between Mormon birthrates and the national average is narrowing (Riess 2019). This affects overall fertility in Utah. Table 4 shows that births in Utah dropped from 20 per 1000 residents in 2001 to 14 per 1000 in 2022. Utah no longer has the nation's highest birthrate. Utah women had 1.5 more children than the national average in 1980. By 2016 this had fallen to just .4 more (Perlich 2016). Moreover, among the state's remaining births, a decreasing share are to Mormon women, as LDS birth rates fall and a rapid influx of Hispanic immigrants with robust fertility enter the state.

TABLE 4 Utah birth rate*

Year	Utah population	Crude birth rate (per 1,000)
2001	2,284,000	20.0
2002	2,337,321	19.7
2003	2,390,641	19.4
2004	2,443,962	19.1
2005	2,497,282	18.9
2006	2,550,603	18.6
2007	2,603,923	18.3
2008	2,657,244	18.0
2009	2,710,564	17.7
2010	2,763,885	17.4
2011	2,814,658	17.1
2012	2,865,431	16.9
2013	2,916,204	16.6
2014	2,966,977	16.3
2015	3,017,751	16.0
2016	3,068,524	15.7
2017	3,119,297	15.4
2018	3,170,070	15.1
2019	3,220,843	14.9
2020	3,271,616	14.6
2021	3,338,000	14.3
2022	3,338,000	14.0

*Data are from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2023).

5.3 *Migration*

Finally, we examine the effects of migration on Utah's Mormon majority. A preference for living in enclaves has been a component of Mormon culture since the church's founding (Shipps 1985). The first non-Indigenous, permanent settlements in the Great Basin were founded by Mormon pioneers leaving the United States to practice their religion in isolation (Alexander 2003). Migration was an obligation for new converts to the faith, and the doctrine of "gathering" required all who were capable to relocate to the region (Arrington,

et al. 1992). Converts from England and Scandinavia were a primary source of Mormon migrants (Perlich 2006).

The doctrine of the gathering was suspended in the early 20th century as population growth began to stress the resources of the arid Great Basin (Alexander 1986). Nevertheless, the desire to live in enclaves continued to draw converts to the nascent state of Utah (Toney *et al.* 1983). Religiously motivated migration was still prevalent in the 1980s (Larson 1988). Until recently, aspects of Mormon culture were irreplicable outside Utah. Some Latter-day Saints in the eastern U.S. had to drive for hours to reach the nearest temple. Products catering to Mormons—ubiquitous in shops along the Wasatch Front—were unavailable elsewhere (Phillips 2001).

But religious migration is waning (Kontuly *et al.* 1995). This is partly due to the church's efforts to standardize its programs and distinguish church norms from Utah's *sui generis* Mormon subculture (Cleverley 1996; Rutherford 2016). An ambitious construction program is planting temples across the nation, cutting travel time and making attendance easy. In 1980, there were 7 temples in the U.S. outside Utah. At the close of 2023 there are 67 with another 12 under construction and 27 announced (Temples of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2023). Finally, online commerce has made Mormon products readily available nationwide. Moving to Utah is no longer required to construct and maintain a robust Mormon identity.

The demography of current Utah migrants indicates a shift from people coming to the state for religious solidarity to those seeking a lower cost of living and economic opportunity (Toney *et al.* 1983). One team of Utah demographers observes:

> Although the state possesses a unique religious heritage … migrants to the state show more similarities than differences to the average American citizen. The implication for understanding migration patterns is that even in a region where cultural attachment is strong, utilitarian motives predominate. (Kontuly *et al.* 1995:191)

There have been more migrants arriving in Utah than emigrants leaving every year since 1990 (Toney and Kim 2006). Most arrive from states in the Intermountain and Pacific regions (Harris and Prior 2023). By 2019, 1 in every 13 Utahns was born in California (Utah Department of Workforce Services 2023). Western states are among the least religious in the nation, and "None" is the modal religious orientation in most of them (PRRI 2022). Aside from Idaho—where a large Mormon population resides close to the Utah border—these are also states where Mormons are a small minority.

The racial composition of Utah's population has changed as well (Downey and Timberlake 2006). Utah has traditionally been among the nation's whitest states (Lopez *et al.* 2012). But Utah's non-White population increased from 2% in 1960 to 20% in 2010 (Kem C Gardner Policy Institute 2017). Over 10% of Utahans came from outside the U.S.—primarily from Mexico and Latin America (American Immigration Council 2020).

While Utah's non-white population grew, the racial composition of Mormons in the state remained the same. One study found that 95% of Utah Mormons were White non-Hispanic (Phillips and Cragun 2011). A 2011 survey of Mormons conducted by the Pew Research Center showed similar results (Pew Research Center 2012). Hence, it is likely that most people moving to Utah in the 21st century are not LDS (Kosmin and Keysar 2006; O'Brien and Palmer 2007).

An average of 121,000 people moved to Utah every year between 2015 and 2019. These immigrants were offset by 87,000 emigrants leaving Utah, resulting in a net gain of 34,000 residents. Utah's population grew by about 52,700 in each of these years (Harris and Prior 2013). Thus, about two-thirds of Utah's population growth stems from in-migration and not natural increase. Moreover, of the remaining third attributable to births, Mormons comprise a decreasing share since their fertility rates are approaching parity with non-Mormons.

In sum, the demography of Utah in-migrants suggests that any residual religiously motivated migration to the state is being swamped by non-Mormons moving in. Migration is a major reason why Mormons lost their majority in the state.

6 Reciprocal Trends

Secularization, declining fertility, and migration reinforce and amplify each other, combining to reduce the Mormon share of Utah's population.

6.1 *Secularization and Fertility*

Secularization is associated with declining fertility (Blekesaune and Skirbekk 2022). This is specifically true for Mormons (Shain 2019; Stanford and Smith 2013; Heaton and Calkins 1983; Heaton and Goodman 1985). Throughout the 20th century, the fusion of church and community norms in Utah fostered a social environment conducive to large families. In the 1980s, this pronatalism increased non-Mormon fertility in the state because religious and public expectations were conflated (Toney, Golesorkhi and Stinner 1985). Mormons

leaving Utah reduced their fertility even when holding religiosity constant. In the 1970s, Pitcher, Peterson and Kunz (1974:151) observed:

> In spite of ancestral attachments and religious ties, the culture of the alien secular environment eventually affected the behavior of Mormon immigrants. As was hypothesized, our data show that, especially in recent years, Mormon couples residing in a non-Mormon environment have significantly smaller families than Mormon couples residing in Utah.

In the 21st century, secularization circumscribed the scope of church norms in Utah and limited their influence in the public sphere. The cultural pressure to have children weakened (Shain 2019). The state's religious subculture now lacks the power to affect the fertility of outsiders as it once did, and the non-Mormon birth rate in Utah has regressed to the national mean (Hackett and Pullum 2010). Mormon fertility has also declined.

6.2 *Secularization and Migration*

Secularization also affects migration to Utah. In the past, Utah's religious subculture attracted Latter-day Saints who wanted to live among co-religionists. But what made Utah an inviting place for Mormons made it inhospitable for outsiders. Utah's non-Mormon minority has always chafed at Mormon clannishness and grumbled about discrimination (Abunuwara *et al.* 2018; Marlowe 2005; Barber 1995).

Increasing apostasy from the LDS Church made moving to Utah more attractive for non-Mormons. As former Mormons began to change the tenor of neighborhoods, workplaces, and civic organizations, fitting in became easier for new arrivals (Phillips 2014). For example, Utah's arcane liquor laws were designed to stigmatize alcohol consumption and serve as "an ever-present symbol to outsiders that Utah is a Mormon state" (Shipps 2005:175). These laws have been ridiculed in the national press (Patton 2018). A critical mass of former Mormons and new migrants have neutralized this stigma, and Utah's liquor laws are evolving (Dumas 2023).

6.3 *Fertility and Migration*

Fertility and migration also interact to erode the Mormon share of Utah's population. Natural increase among Mormons has traditionally outpaced non-Mormon in-migration (Phillips 2001). But the combined effect of declining fertility and accelerated migration into Utah has changed this dynamic.

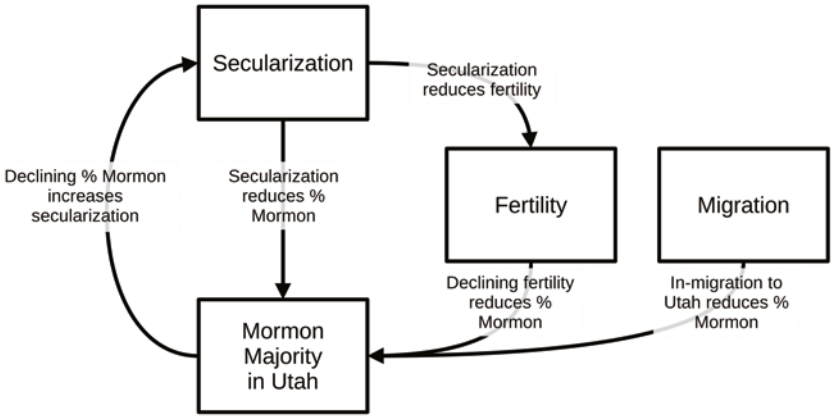

FIGURE 1 Secularization feedback loop in Utah

The dwindling Mormon population in Utah—itself an outcome of secularization—accelerates the continued secularization process in a positive feedback loop. In 2004 Utah had the highest church membership rate in the nation (Stark and Finke 2004). By 2022, people with no religion were 25% of Utah's population, near the national mean of 27% (PRRI 2022). This is a rapid, substantial change in Utah's religious demography fueled primarily by Mormon defections.

Defection from the LDS Church and the rejection of religion is a principal manifestation of secularization among individuals. At the aggregate level, the church is losing its ability to influence behavior in neighborhoods, workplaces, and civic organizations. This in turn makes it easier for Mormons who are questioning their faith to leave it behind without social penalties. The social costs of leaving the church in an era of large Mormon majorities is well-documented (Phillips 2018; Phillips *et al.* 2015; Phillips 2014).

7 Conclusion

Based on a survey of Utahans that uses self-reported church membership, we assert that Mormons are no longer a majority in Utah. This assertion conflicts with LDS Church rolls, which show a Mormon majority persists in the state. However, the church uses membership criteria that are not useful for social scientists, and Mormon leaders have used these dubious numbers for public relations and propaganda (Phillips 2006). An accurate estimate of Utah's Mormon

population is important because several theories of church growth and vitality use the state's unique religious landscape as a case study (Stark 2005; McDermott 2005).

The Mormon majority in Utah waned despite the LDS Church's efforts to retain members. The church continues to do missionary outreach in Utah, and still emphasizes large families. Moreover, studies show that religiosity is correlated with reduced mortality (Idler *et al.* 2017). This correlation appears more robust in places like Utah where religion is prominent (Ebert *et al.* 2020). Mormons in Utah live longer on average than non-Mormons (Merrill 2004). This is largely attributable to the LDS Church's health code, which prohibits the use of tobacco and alcohol (Enstrom and Breslow 2008). Thus, the religious culture in Utah and Mormon longevity should fortify and safeguard the Mormon majority. Nevertheless, the Mormon share of Utah's population is dwindling.

We assert that the Mormon majority dissipated because of a general secularizing trend, reduced fertility within the church, and an influx of non-LDS migrants to Utah. Mormons in Utah have always had higher levels of religiosity than Mormons living elsewhere, but as these trends erode the church's power to affect social life beyond the ecclesiastical sphere, this distinction is disappearing (Canham 2018; Phillips 2018). Our conclusions should be confirmed by social scientists using standard representative sampling. Until then, we offer our assessment as provisional.

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